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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Legislation before the Planning and Development Committee on March 1, 2013	Support/ Oppose
RAISED S.B. 961: AN ACT CONCERNING THE ASSESSMENT OF LIVESTOCK AND FARM MACHINERY AND THE TRANSFER OF LAND CLASSIFIED AS FARM LAND, OPEN SPACE LAND, FOREST LAND, AND MARITIME HERITAGE LAND.	Support

Co-Chairs Cassano, Rojas, and Members of the Planning & Development Committee,

In 1895, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) became the first conservation organization established in Connecticut. CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly every year since 1897 on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation.

On behalf of CFPA's members and as an organization integrally involved with the original effort to establish Public Act 490, I submit testimony today in favor of Raised S.B. 961. S.B. 961 is the outgrowth of efforts by the CT Farm Bureau, CT Association of Assessing Officers, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Department of Agriculture, and CFPA over the past 2 years to update and provide technical corrections to P.A. 490: one of Connecticut's most important conservation laws.

There is language in P.A. 490 that needs to be updated, such as references to "husband" and "wife" being changed to "spouse." And there are areas where the original law was not clarified such as making clear that a new property owner (who received the property for any reason other than a sale) must simply file an update application to keep the town's records up to date and ensure the potential P.A. 490 penalty period would not start at year 0. There are technical changes in reporting dates that allow for reasonable extensions in years when assessors are overwhelmed with periodic townwide revaluation requirements.

This bill would also clarify existing inconsistencies between two sections of the statutes (CGS 12-91). Currently, one section of the statute requires that municipalities exempt up to \$100,000 *in value* on farm equipment, and section (b) allows for a municipal option to increase that exemption by \$100,000 *in assessed value*. This bill would use the *assessed value* to harmonize both sections of the law.

Lastly, we strongly support the language requiring a report by a certified forester when P.A. 490 forest land has a change in ownership and such a report has not previously been done. This is a smart measure to help ensure forested properties will receive the best advice on being managed sustainably to meet aesthetic, wildlife, economic, and other landowner goals.

I want to thank our partners in the CT Farm Bureau, CT Association of Assessing Officers, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Department of Agriculture, as well as the General Assembly for making Public Act 490 the outstanding success it is.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.